

AN ESSAY

ON

MEDICAL REFORM,

EXTRACTED FROM No. XXI. OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN
REVIEW, FOR JULY, 1840.

ALSO,

LETTERS ON MEDICAL SUBJECTS,

WHICH HAVE APPEARED IN THE LANCET.

BY W. SIMPSON, Esq., SURGEON,


FELLOW OF THE MEDICAL SOCIETY, &c. &c.

LONDON:

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AN ESSAY
ON
MEDICAL REFORM,

&c. &c. &c.

THE subject of reform in the medical institutions of this country having at last assumed a more tangible shape than heretofore, we hasten to lay before our readers a statement of some facts connected with it. Since the opening of the present session of parliament a number of petitions have been presented in the House of Commons, and Mr. Warburton has promised to move for the re-appointment of the Medical Committee, which sat in 1834. Mr. French, the member for Roscommon, is also taking an active part on the subject; and Mr. Hawes has offered his assistance to carry through a bill to remedy the grievances complained of. In the House of Lords, the Duke of Richmond, the Marquises of Lansdowne and Normanby, the Earls of Durham and Ripon, Lord Brougham, and other noble lords, have admitted the necessity of some legislative measure on the subject. We observe from the public papers and other sources, that petitions continue to be poured in from all parts of the country, particularly from the numerous and influential members of the medical associations which exist in England, Ireland, and Scotland, the members of which are nearly unanimous in their views as to the objects to be attained.

As the medical institutions and governing bodies of the three portions of the United Kingdom are of different kinds, and differ even among themselves in their forms and regulations of study, examinations, &c., it may be as well to point out, in the first place, some of the anomalies and absurdities which exist.

A graduate from Oxford or Cambridge looks down with contempt upon a graduate from Edinburgh or Glasgow ; but go to India, or any other portion of our colonial empire, and you never hear of such a thing as an English physician—they are all *Scotch doctors*. By the term Scotch doctors it is not to be understood that all or even the majority of those who possess degrees or diplomas from Scotland are natives of that part of the kingdom ; on the contrary, we are led to believe it to be an established fact, that the majority of gentlemen who graduate at Edinburgh, are from England, Ireland, and other parts of the world. For a similar reason, by English physician we do not mean natives of England exclusively, but the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge.

With regard to surgeons, to all intents and purposes the diplomas in surgery from London, Edinburgh, and Dublin are equal. They are considered so in the army and navy, and all over our colonies : to which, be it borne in mind, nearly three-fourths of our medical men find their way. How absurd, therefore, is it that the person qualified to practice medicine and surgery on this side the Tweed is by law prevented from doing so on the other side, and *vice versa* ! Every person possessed of the least degree of reasoning power will at once be able to understand the necessity to the nation at large of having as good doctors in India, Canada, Australia, and the West Indies, as in England and Wales ; and that the grossest of all monopolies would be that of keeping all the virtuous and *moral* doctors at home in England, and sending the *low fellows* abroad, where the presence and moral influence of the best educated and highest principled would be likely to be most wanted. Strange to say, the arrogance and ignorance of English practitioners in general, till within the last few years, have been the cause of producing a greater amount of successful quacks than ever existed in any other civilized country ; while in the despised portions of the United Kingdom, called Scotland and Ireland, the name of quack is scarcely known. Yet in England we have graduates in medicine from Oxford and Cambridge ; fellows and licentiates of the Royal College of Physicians ; graduates of the London University ; members of the Royal College of Surgeons ; and licentiates of the Apothecaries' Company. The last-mentioned company, which every person will be free to admit ought to be the lowest and least important, assumes more power, founded on an Act of Parliament passed in 1815, than all the others put together. It insists upon the right to punish Scotch or Irish medical men for practising their profession in Eng-

land and Wales, while it has not the means of preventing the chemist and druggist, or mere buyer and seller of medicine, from practising *all the branches* of the profession.

In Scotland there are five Universities, one College of Surgeons and a Faculty of Surgeons, in Glasgow. They have no apothecaries' company, as they wisely consider that a physician or surgeon should know all the branches of his profession; that the physician, in case of necessity, ought to be able to either bleed a patient or make up a draught for him; that the medical profession, like the army and navy, will be best manned and officered by obliging every candidate to go through all the lower ranks previous to his assuming that of major or captain. They, therefore, in their curricula of the studies required, and at their examinations, lay as much stress upon proficiency in chemistry, pharmacy, and midwifery, as they do upon the knowledge requisite for being able to prescribe for apoplexy, or operate for stone or hernia.

The graduates of Trinity College, Dublin, and the fellows of the College of Physicians, Dublin, are in a precisely similar situation with those of England. The Apothecaries' Company of Ireland is more like what it ought to be than that of England, in so far as its power merely extends over sellers and compounders of medicine; but, strange also to say, in its desire for absolute necessity, it has frequently attempted to prevent regularly-educated surgeons and physicians from making up medicines and prescriptions for their own patients.

Stranger still, it appears, that although all these bodies profess and pretend to so much superiority over each other, the medical student, whether he come forward with a view to practice as a physician, a surgeon, or an apothecary, must dissect in the same way, attend lectures at the same time, walk the hospitals in the same manner, read the same works upon the various subjects connected with the profession, and undergo an equally severe examination;—the only difference being, that by paying thirty or forty pounds he can be a physician; if he pays about twenty pounds he can be a surgeon, and if six or ten pounds he can be an apothecary. From the above we of course except the candidates for medical honours at Oxford and Cambridge: it having been admitted by Sir Henry Hallford, when examined before the Medical Committee, that the only reason why Oxford and Cambridge ought to be supported was—the superiority of the *moral* and classical education which the members had to go through. He also admitted, that for

such graduates to be able to practise successfully it would be necessary (*after having received the degree of M.D.*) for them to go to Edinburgh, Paris, or some university on the continent, to learn their profession.* When did we ever hear of a pure English physician being at the head of the medical departments of the army or navy? Was Sir Gilbert Blaine one of the morally educated pupils of Oxford or Cambridge? Is Sir James MacGregor one of them? Is Sir William Burnet one of them? Is Dr. Hume, the friend and companion of the illustrious and sagacious Duke of Wellington, one of them? Is Sir James Clarke one of them? Or was their venerable and adopted Dr. Babington one of them? When did we ever hear of one of them being at the head of the medical departments in Russia? When did we ever hear of one of them being the most eminent physician in Constantinople? Or when did we ever hear of one of them finding favour in the intellectual eyes of the Pacha of Egypt? When did we ever hear of them risking their lives in wandering over deserts and climbing mountains, in the hope of discovering some herb or medicine that might be useful to the human race, or exposing themselves to the black vomit of the West Indies, or the plague spots of Egypt?

In France, Prussia, Germany, and America, things are done in a different way. The medical corporations of Great Britain and Ireland are more like the discordant cantons of Switzerland than the consolidated and intellectual systems (so far as extends to the medical profession) of France or Prussia. America in her medical institutions is in perfect keeping with the principles on which the nation itself is governed: eminence is to be acquired solely by superior knowledge, talent, industry, and perseverance.

In an oration delivered at the second anniversary of the British Medical Association, Dr. Granville thus happily illustrated the difference between the universities of Germany and our own:—

“According to the most recent of the published statistical calculations, there are not fewer than 1050 professors attached to the present universities of Germany. They lecture to about 16,500 students who cannot matriculate for medicine or surgery without having taken either the degree of doctor of philosophy or that of bachelor of letters, each of which involves preliminary studies of four years at least; after which the student is as many years more removed from the degrees of doctor of medicine or surgery. It is worthy of remark, that this large number of professors, dependent on the very necessity of a

* Query. Do all the graduates at the above places undergo the same moral and intellectual training, or do some of them merely show their faces from time to time, like law-students before being called to the bar?

varied and long preliminary education in the universities of Germany, involves, according to the same statistical accounts, an annual expenditure of money of not less than 600,000*l.* sterling, which circulates within the precincts of these universities: an expenditure which arises from the income paid to the professors and the money expended by the pupils. Is this an evidence of inferiority in preliminary intellectual knowledge on the part of foreign universities, as compared with those of Oxford or Cambridge? Not to multiply examples, and taking them rather from the smaller than the larger universities in Germany, at which medicine is taught, we find that in five of them alone, named, Heidelberg, Freiberg, Wurtzburg, Erlangen, and Marburg, 37,950*l.* sterling, which is equivalent to at least double that sum in England, is granted by their respective governments every year for the purpose of instruction. In what corner of Great Britain are there five public schools granting degrees in arts and sciences which receive from Government the quarter of that sum of money? or what proportion of money equivalent to the same sum (75,000*l.*) is expended by the colleges of the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and from their own funds, purely for the preliminary and medical education of students?"

Is it not then our duty to compare ourselves with our neighbours, and if we find them right and ourselves wrong, should we not proceed forthwith to remodel our medical corporations and institutions according to the dictates of reason, experience, and common sense? Every candid man will answer in the affirmative; and what is there to prevent such a desirable consummation of this long-agitated question? We tell him, 'It is nothing but the self-interest of self-elected and self-perpetuating presidents and councils, who have the power of making bye-laws to suit their own purposes, and who exclude the great body of the profession from having any voice or interest in the proceedings of the colleges to which they belong. In an excellent oration, delivered last year to the British Medical Association, and published in the *Lancet* for October 19, 1839, it was truly stated by Mr. Farr†, that,

"More than 17,000 members are excluded from all power in the medical corporations. They are deprived of large sums of money by self-election and irresponsible councils; unjust distinctions are maintained: degrees, titles, and licences are conferred upon no uniform principle; and, notwithstanding the companies which profess to repress quackery and unlicensed practitioners, there never was a time when a greater number of lives were sacrificed by patent medicines and ignorant empirics."

Again, he says,

"The medical corporations retain all the worst features of the corrupt municipal corporations which have been effectually reformed by Government. The

* It is to the pen of this gentleman that we are indebted for the weekly and other statements of the health of the metropolis, and the records of diseases most prevalent during the same periods.

councils are self-elective and irresponsible; the members are taxed by an admission fee, to the amount of perhaps 30,000*l.* or 40,000*l.* a-year; and regulations are made, which confer exclusive privileges, honours, and pecuniary monopolies upon the corporators and their satellites.

Free and fair elections and equal representation would not suit the purposes of such bodies. Elections so conducted might, and in all probability would, give them officers less warmly attached to the interests of monopolizing bodies than those of science in general. Against this danger they have adopted the plan but too common in such cases. They have raised a semi-religious cry, only not libelling the characters of those whom it has been found expedient to attack. They have practised on the alarms of the timid, and the prejudices of the weak; and having nicknamed their opponents "Radicals and Destructives," they trust to the support of the large acquiescent class with whom these terms are necessarily unpopular, however indiscriminately applied. That the public at large can be hoodwinked by such means we of course do not imagine; but artifices of this description have already been more successful than they ought, with men whose lofty station, by rendering their actions more than commonly important, should render them more than commonly cautious as to the grounds upon which they act.

We now turn our attention to what has been going on during the last few years about these matters, and it is but right that those individuals who have struggled and done service in the cause should have due acknowledgment.

Dr. James Johnson, the eminent physician, and founder of the *Medico-Chirurgical Review*, has at all times been a sincere and ardent advocate for reform, and a determined enemy to all abuses, no matter where to be found, in the medical profession. Long may he live to adorn the profession by his talents, and enlighten the public by his writings.

Mr. Wakley, the editor of the *Lancet*, coroner for Middlesex, and member of parliament for the important borough of Finsbury, has gained himself honour in the eyes of the majority of medical men by his unceasing and determined hostility to abuses and monopolies, some of which he has so ably exposed and lashed, that their very supporters are now ashamed of their by-gone practices. To the talented writers of the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, and also of the *London Medical and Surgical Journal*, great credit is due for the fair and candid manner in which the subject has been discussed. The *Dublin Medical Press*, during the short period it has existed, has

done great good in the cause; and to Dr. Maunsell, its editor and founder, and its other able contributors, the hearty thanks of the profession are due: we sincerely hope that no difference of opinion on mere matters of detail will at any time disturb the harmony which now reigns among these gentlemen as to the necessity of some organic change.

The British and Foreign Medical Review, conducted by the able and experienced Drs. Forbes and Conolly, has also contributed much to the elucidation of the subject. And where can we find names of greater respectability either in or out of the profession? They at least cannot be accused of sinister motives! Among the rest, must not be forgotten the eminent and patriotic Carmichael of Dublin, who, for a long series of years, stood alone in opposition to the selfish practices of the Dublin College of Surgeons, but who has had the rare felicity of living to see the former defendants of these abuses come round to his opinions, and advocate them publicly with as much zeal and ability as they had previously opposed them.

Great praise is also due to Dr. Webster of Dulwich, the indefatigable President of the British Medical Association, whose services during the last three or four years have been unceasing.

Mr. Wood of Edinburgh, formerly President of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, has also taken a great deal of trouble in bringing the conflicting interests of medical men in Edinburgh together; but hitherto they have not entertained such enlarged views upon the subject as we were entitled to expect. With such representatives in parliament as Mr. Macauley and Sir J. Campbell, we are surprised to find so little done by them.

After having thus stated some of the principal facts and grievances connected with the present and past state of the profession, we now come to the most important and difficult part of the subject (but which fortunately has not escaped the attention and deep consideration of the gentlemen already mentioned); we mean,—What is the remedy? That remedy must be a legislative enactment of so comprehensive a nature, as not only to eradicate but also to prevent for the future all those abuses which have been shown to exist at the present moment. In approaching this point, we again avail ourselves of Mr. Farr's able and philosophic oration.

“The science of medicine is the science of human health; it comprises a knowledge of the structure, functions, and history of the organisation; and a knowledge of the diseases to which it is subject, as well as the influences of the

atmosphere, the earth, the food, and the remedies which have been supplied by nature or by art. Medical science averts disease, calms suffering, prolongs existence. Mankind agree in considering it the oracle of life; in sickness and anguish they believe in its resources; and only bow the head, satisfied in death, when it abandons hope. The members of the medical profession are the agents by which the principles of medical science are applied practically, and brought home in the hour of need, to individuals and to families. Now, who will deny, that so long as sickness prevails, and death threatens, and man exists, the office of physician must remain of insurpassable importance? and that medical education, the examination to which candidates are bound to submit, the medical police, and the construction of the medical institutions of the country, should command the attention of a wise national legislature, which, like the legislators of antiquity, deems the physical perfection of the people the sole basis of their moral and intellectual greatness?" * * *

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"In history, many national disasters are recorded, which may be traced to violations of the laws of health. Athens, the first state of Greece, was paralysed at the commencement of the Peloponnesian war by the plague, which was introduced or aggravated by the leader of the people, Pericles. The plague had been hovering around the shores of the Mediterranean, in Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Persian empire, when Sparta and its allies approached Attica. Upon the advice of Pericles, the ardent Athenians, who lived in country houses scattered over Attica, instead of fighting the enemy in the open field, retired within the walls of Athens, where they were crowded in ill-constructed, ill-ventilated dwellings, or lodged in caves or miserable huts. The plague, as might have been foreseen, swooped upon the city, carried off the flower of the citizens, and shattered their armies. Athens never recovered this stroke in war; her most illustrious chiefs fell; Pericles placed the funeral wreath upon the grave of his last legitimate son, and perished a victim of his ill-judged policy. The depopulation of the cities of England in the middle ages, the direct result of their ill-construction, retarded the progress of civilization in this country. Several military expeditions have failed; for instance, that of Walcheren; and a fourth of the strength of our armies has remained disabled in recent campaigns, through ignorance of the simple laws of hygeiology. A considerable amount of the pauperism which pervades the population may be traced to sickness, the result of a neglect of medical police, as its natural cause." * * *

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"Nevertheless, medical art is but in its infancy; the laws of vitality, the principles of disease, and therapeutics, have been but imperfectly explored. Physiology has some of its highest problems reserved for solution. The generation and history of morbid products; the duration and fatality of diseases at all ages, and in different periods of their progress; the specific influence of remedies, and the relative value of methods of treatment, have yet to be accurately determined. In some localities, plague, remittent fever, ague, typhus, dysentery, are generated. In one set of circumstances 100 places will suffer 50, in others 100, in others 150 attacks of disease annually. The causes of disease, then, are a highly important subject of inquiry, for the prevention

of disease falls within the province of medicine. People live 20, or 30, or 40, or 50 years upon an average in different places. Is it not possible to extend the term of life of the entire population, until they number the days of the years of life decreed by nature, and are gathered like a shock of corn, ripe, to the home of their fathers? Is the child, the brother, the wife, the friend, to be carried away in all the freshness of youth, before your eyes, for ever, in the triumphant arms of death? The hopes and the agonies of humanity answer, No." * * * * *

"Man may, perhaps, approach organic perfection; the body can never attain immortality or live to the age of Methuselah; but is it agreeable to the analogies and laws of nature that it should perish so near the period of its origin?—This opens a wide field to the champions of our art; and the laurels that they win will be spotted neither with blood nor tears, but will remain green for ever, in the dews of heaven.—But alas! this prospect is overclouded. No assistance is afforded to the enterprising discoverer; endless obstacles are thrown in the way; and the means of bringing the present advantages of medical skill within the reach of the entire population are withheld.—You find hindrances where you looked for help.—The public are left without a guide; are actually misled by innumerable licensing bodies in different parts of the kingdom; or are left at the mercy of quacks and prescribing druggists, by the laws and corporations which promised them protection."

Without taking upon ourselves the responsibility of recommending any one particular plan that would meet all the emergencies of the case, and at the same time be satisfactory to all the parties who are advocating the same principles; we consider we cannot do better than repeat the substance and prayer of various memorials and petitions which have been presented to various members of the government, and by various members to the House of Commons. In a memorial from the Council of the Medical Association of Ireland to the Marquis of Normanby, Secretary of State for the Home Department, signed by R. Carmichael, President, and H. Maunsell, Secretary, we find the following:—

"The first and most essential step then we believe to be the adoption of means for securing a body of educated and well-ordered men for the public and private service.—Until this be done no improvement can be effected; and we beg leave respectfully to submit, that there does not now exist any machinery for its accomplishment.—We have already reminded Your Lordship, that no legal definition of the medical character is in use, and it will cease to be matter of surprise that such should be the case, when it is further considered that there are in the three Kingdoms no fewer than seventeen bodies claiming chartered or statutory rights to confer this character, and that all of them differ from each other in their constitutions, all possess the power of making bye-laws for their own governance,—and all impose different tests of the fitness of those whom they profess to admit into the medical profession. It is an additional fact, that all these bodies are dependent for their support upon the fees paid for

these admissions, and the practical result, as might naturally be expected, has been a competition as to which should draw the greatest number of customers, by offering their goods upon the lowest terms.—Thus instead of protecting the public, and providing for their service a supply of well-educated men, the actual working of these corporations has been to overload the profession with a vast number of competitors, without affording any security as to their competency for the safe exercise of their calling.

“We would therefore respectfully suggest, that a legislative enactment should be adopted, establishing one responsible and competent tribunal in each of the Three Kingdoms, without whose licence and enrolment no person should be legally acknowledged as a medical man;—that such licence should be granted in every case upon precisely similar exercises, examinations and fees, to be specified by law, and that it should confer equal privileges throughout the British dominions. With respect to the formation of such a tribunal, we conceive that there is a choice of three plans:—1st. the members of it might be nominated and controlled by the crown: or 2nd. *elected by, and made responsible to, the profession*: or 3rd. they might be appointed by a mixed mode, the profession returning a number of names from which the crown might select.—It would be for the wisdom of government to choose one of these plans,—The expenditure of such a machinery need not increase the burthens of the country, as it would be more than defrayed by the fees for licensing and registration, care being taken of course to remunerate the members of the licensing board by salaries, and not by any direct interest in the number of persons licensed.—Such an arrangement we conceive could be effected without interfering with existing medical institutions, which it is not our desire to destroy; and we think it would be reasonable and just to allot to each, a portion of the licence and registration fund, as compensation for their probable loss of income, and to enable them to maintain their position as educational and scientific establishments.—This we are also of opinion is the utmost that these bodies have a right to expect, their claims to support being grounded solely on their capability of promoting the public good, to which they unquestionably do not contribute by their present indiscriminate sale of medical titles, even though they may honestly and faithfully administer the money thus acquired. The advantages, immediate and remote, which must flow from a simple measure, such as we have suggested, cannot fail to strike Your Lordship. The licensing and registration, by an authorised and responsible board, of all persons acknowledged by law as medical practitioners, would effectually remedy those evils in the administration of the civil and criminal law, which we have already pointed out. Medical evidence would then become an instrument of justice, and not, as at present it too often is, a mere matter of form, or a contrivance for shielding the guilty, or, as in the case of alleged lunatics, for oppressing the innocent. Real not nominal medical relief would be provided for the poor. The public would be enabled to discriminate between those qualified (by education and character) to take charge of their health, and the ignorant pretender. The Government would be empowered to avail itself of the assistance of a competent medical department, under its own protection and control, and might even derive considerable revenue from the surplus receipts of a well-managed registration.—Lastly, the profession itself would lose its uncertain and empi-

rical character, and be acknowledged as a useful and efficient portion of the social system, while the medical corporations being released from their present disgraceful traffic in diploma paper, would have leisure to attend to medical education, and the advancement of the scientific and social interests of the profession.”

At a Meeting of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, held on the 26th of October 1839, it was unanimously resolved:—

1st. That a memorial on the subject of medical reform be forwarded, without delay, to her Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Home Department.

2nd. That the committee be authorised to forward petitions of a similar import to both Houses of Parliament at the commencement of next session.

3rd. That all parties interested in this important matter be invited to co-operate with the College, in endeavouring to impress on the government and the legislature, the necessity of some effectual steps being taken for remedying the grievances under which the profession at present labours—grievances which affect injuriously the interest of the public, by depriving them in particular situations of the professional services of the best-qualified practitioners.

A very excellent petition was presented to the House of Commons on January 31st, by Mr. French, from Mr. Dermott, lecturer on anatomy. It was received with great attention by the House, and ordered to be printed. After stating the grievances from which the medical profession suffers, it concluded by praying

“ that the report upon the evidence taken on the subject of medical reform in 1834, be printed, and that a measure of reform for the benefit of the public, and the relief of the medical profession from the grievances under which it has been permitted so long and so sorely to labour, may not be any longer delayed.”

Mr. Macaulay, the Secretary at War, and one of the Cabinet Ministers, also presented a petition from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, on nearly the same subject. A petition from the Northern Medical Association concludes with praying

“ that Your Honourable House will adopt such measures as will confer upon the medical profession a sound and efficient legal constitution, and place it under a system of government based upon such principles as shall protect the interests alike of its members and the public—enforce uniformity of education

and examination for all who enter it—prevent illegal practice—and confer uniformity of privilege upon practitioners throughout England, Scotland and Ireland.”

The petition of the British Medical Association presented by the Marquis of Normanby in the House of Lords, and the Solicitor-General in the House of Commons, among other lucid and well-considered paragraphs, concludes as follows :—

“ That however well the existing corporations may have been adapted to the times and circumstances from which many of them date their origin, they are utterly inconsistent with the progress of science, and inadequate to the wants and intelligence of the public in the present day.

“ That from the defective constitution of the licensing bodies, none of them have the power of conferring the right to practise in every part of the Empire, however qualified the candidates may be ; while there is no legislative enactment to prevent the most ignorant pretender and empiric from practising all or any of the departments of medicine in any part of Her Majesty’s dominions.

“ That it is the opinion of Your Petitioners, founded upon reflection and experience, that medicine and surgery, now exercised as distinct branches of the profession in this country, constitute in reality but one science ; and that therefore the existence of eighteen or nineteen licensing and graduating bodies in the United Kingdom, differing widely from each other in their requirements of qualifications from candidates, as well as in their power of conferring titles and licenses to practice (a state of things unknown in any other civilized country in the world), must be and is found to act injuriously to the best interests of the public, and only serves to create jealousies and dissensions among the members of the profession.

“ That the obvious as well as the most effectual remedy for all the evils alluded to by Your Petitioners, would be the establishment of a single Representative Corporation or Faculty of Medicine for the general government of the profession, and the admission to the privileges of practising in the British dominions as the result only of an effectual education and examinations.

“ Your Petitioners therefore earnestly implore Your Honourable House to take this important question into your most serious consideration, and to direct that a Bill may be passed as speedily as possible for the consolidation of the medical profession into one faculty, having full power to regulate the examination and government of the whole body, and to confer equal rights and privileges upon all its members.”

The Medical Associations existing in the north of Ireland, Glasgow and other parts of Scotland (separate from the Colleges and Schools of Edinburgh), are almost completely of the same opinion with regard to the remedy required. We thus have the great body of the profession in England, who have formed themselves into five or six associations in different parts of England ; the great body of

the profession in Scotland, who have formed themselves into four or five associations in various parts of Scotland, such as Glasgow, Aberdeen, etc. and the same in Ireland;—all complaining of the same grievances, all pointing out the same absurdities, all desiring the same remedies, and all petitioning for the same redress. How then does it happen that nothing is done? There are various reasons; such as opposition from interested parties, to which we have alluded; but still more the state of political parties in the House of Commons, from which it results, that the ministers and their dependents are more attentive to, and occupied by manœuvres to defeat their adversaries, than in getting rid of public and private grievances and oppressions. Yet on this point, the *Reforming* Ministry must not stop. Lord John Russell must, as a matter of course, follow up his principles in reforming such abuses as exist in the medical corporations; and of obstruction, this not being a party matter, his supporters cannot throw the whole onus on the House of Lords, whom they have been so willing to censure but so loth to combat. Let him not then stand any longer in the way of a needful reform in a respectable and honourable profession, in forwarding which there is not the least danger of his favourite views being affected; perhaps, his showing some ardour in such a cause might help to make up for his unpopular doctrines on other subjects. Let him not leave too many such questions to be taken up by his expectant successors, by which they would be able to make themselves popular with a set of gentlemen who are not few in number, nor without interest in the community, who are scattered over every county and borough in the United Kingdom, who can and will act on election committees, and who can and if necessary will assist in the putting out of any member of parliament, who refuses the justice which they demand. If the present ministry wish to stand well with the great body of the medical profession, let them do something, or let them pledge themselves to do something, which may justify their friends and supporters in giving them time. Above all, let them not allow it to appear as if indolence of their own, or flattery of interested parties, weighed more with them than the almost unanimous opinion of those who are best qualified to judge, in every part of the United Kingdom.

ON MEDICAL SUBJECTS.

ATTACHMENT OF THE PLACENTA TO THE CERVIX UTERI.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Several medical gentlemen, to whom Mr. Wilson and myself have related the following case, are of opinion that it contains some critical points of practice, and that it might be worthy of insertion in your valuable publication. The case was one of adhesion of the placenta to the cervix uteri, to a greater extent than Mr. Wilson or myself had ever experienced, attended with alteration of its structure, and great danger arose from its obstructing the descent of the foetus into the pelvis, combined with hæmorrhage to a frightful extent.

I am, Sir, yours most obediently,

110, Guildford-street,
Nov. 25, 1839.

WILLIAM SIMPSON.

On Wednesday the 13th instant, I was sent for to see a patient in the neighbourhood of Fitzroy-square, being engaged to attend at her confinement, which she expected about Christmas. I learned, on my arrival, that she had lost a great deal of blood from the uterus during the previous twenty-four hours. On examination, I found the os uteri sufficiently open to admit one finger, but there had been no pains or uterine contractions. By the application of cloths dipped in cold water over the uterus and pubis, combined with absolute rest in a recumbent position, I was able to arrest the hæmorrhage, and, during the following few days, everything appeared to be going on well. On the fifth night (Sunday) at about 12 o'clock, the hæmorrhage returned with increased violence. Before morning the bed and bed-clothes were completely saturated with blood, and she was scarcely able to move from exhaustion. From a foolish feeling of not wishing to disturb me during the night, I did not see her until the forenoon of Monday. On examination, I found the os uteri dilated to the size of half-a-crown,

but completely blocked up by the placenta; there were also frequent and regular pains in the back. Having waited about an hour, during which time I tried to irritate the uterus with my finger, so as to induce vigorous action, the only result, however, being increased hæmorrhage, I found myself obliged to have recourse to more energetic measures to hasten delivery. During the next hour and a half I gave her about four scruples of ergot, in four doses; this had the desired effect of increasing the pains, and dilating the os uteri to its fullest extent, but also increased the hæmorrhage without altering the position of the placenta or foetus. I now determined to introduce my hand, and, if able to touch the membranes with my finger, to rupture them and bring down the feet. I found the placenta completely grown to the whole circumference of the cervix, with the exception of one spot only, large enough to admit my forefinger; it was so adherent, and so highly organised, as to convey the sensation of there being an uterus within the uterus, the edge of the placenta feeling precisely the same as the edge of an os uteri, dilated to the size of the spot alluded to above. Having succeeded in enlarging the opening to double or treble its size, and the pains continuing strong and frequent, at the urgent solicitation of the patient, I withdrew my hand, in hopes that the membranes would become protruded and the foetus follow in the usual way. In this I was disappointed, and fearing she would sink from loss of blood, I determined to call on my friend Mr. Wilson, sen., of Charlotte-street, and ask his opinion whether I should at once rupture the membranes and bring away the foetus. He kindly offered to accompany me, and I requested him to make the same examination as I had done, and, if he found my opinion correct, to lose no time but push through the opening and bring down the feet.

“This Mr. Wilson found to be necessary. On clearing the vagina from the coagula, he found the os uteri fully dilated, and obstructed by a firm carneous mass, intermixed with coagula, and firmly adherent to the uterus, excepting a small space. Passing his hand partly through this mass to a considerable distance, the membranes were found not ruptured, and through them was felt the arm of the foetus. The feet were sought for, but so great was the obstruction of the placental mass in which the hand was involved, that the operator did not succeed in finding them. The membranes were now ruptured, but the arm plugging up the vagina, prevented any quantity of the liquor amnii from escaping.

The hand was now passed along the arm and abdomen of the foetus, and one foot was readily grasped, but the other was bent upon the nates. Having the foetus, as it were, now floating on the waters, and being anxious to accomplish the evolution before their escape, Mr. Wilson passed his hand along the pelvis until he succeeded in finding the second foot, and pressing firmly with the back of the hand against the head, while he used gentle traction at the feet, the body gradually turned over, and with considerable obstruction, from the indurated placenta, he brought the feet through the os externum.

“Mr. W. now waited a little for the occurrence of natural pains to assist in contracting the uterus, but they were very feeble, notwithstanding some brandy and other stimuli, which had been administered, and with a view to excite them, pressure was made on the abdomen.

“The nates now passed the os externum, and first one arm, and then the other, being quickly hooked down with the fore-finger, in order to prevent pressure on the funis, it was laid on the hollow of the neck. There was no pulsation in the funis when the hand was first introduced into the uterus. The head now quickly followed, but hæmorrhage still continued; gentle traction at the funis was used, when it was suddenly torn away from the placenta by a convulsive jerk of the patient. The danger of the patient from hæmorrhage was now alarmingly increased; therefore the hand was again immediately introduced into the uterus, and the placenta, after several efforts, brought away in shreds, with considerable difficulty.”

On viewing the part brought away, it had more the appearance of mamma or pancreas than placenta, being a highly vascular and organised substance, and nearly the size of two hands. By using bandages, and giving cordials, we were able to prevent her from sinking; but during the next 24 hours, Dr. Marshall Hall himself would have been alarmed at the effects of the loss of so much blood, and surprised that any person could have survived under such circumstances. On the second morning after delivery, she suffered a good deal of pain from the passing of a large coagulum; but I succeeded in allaying the pain by applying warm fomentations, and throwing up into the rectum about a pint and a half of warm water, with a drachm of laudanum. She is now in that state which is denominated “as well as can be expected,” which is not only gratifying, but surprising to her husband and friends, and particularly so to Mr. Wilson and

myself. As our hopes were very faint at one time, I feel extremely obliged to Mr. Wilson for his approbation, and prompt assistance in the case.

* * We have embodied Mr. Wilson's letter in the case.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AND THE SILENT SYSTEM.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—As I am led to understand that the Government are about to make an experiment upon the solitary confinement and silent system of punishment, in the model prison, which is now being erected, I beg to call your attention to the subject, lest it should be adopted and carried too far, without looking to the effects produced by the same system in other countries where it has been tried for some time, particularly in America and Belgium. From reports published in America we find, that long solitary confinement has the effect of debilitating the mind, as well as the body, and after their time has expired, many criminals are thrown upon the world in a state of complete *idiotcy, besides having contracted habits contrary to nature and prejudicial to health.*

A friend, also, informs me that, in Belgium, murderers are sentenced to solitary confinement for life; and, when he was last there, he inquired how long they generally lived; he was told *only a few years, no matter how young or healthy* previously. He also observed that, in Belgium, those criminals had no work to amuse or employ them. I hope some of your readers, who have had opportunities of making personal observations upon this subject, will take it up, as there can be no doubt but that it may be an excellent mode of punishment, when carried to a certain extent, but beyond that it is highly injurious. I, therefore, consider it would be better for the Government to have that point settled before any rules are put in force, otherwise it will be necessary to be continually tinkering and altering their instructions. Mr. William Wilson, of Upper Charlotte-street, Fitzroy-square, had, in his possession, lately, a work of the kind I allude to (published in America), and if he would favour your readers with a few extracts, I think that they would be surprised at the remarkable facts they would unveil. In the report I allude to, there is a great deal of religious feeling and self-laudation

on the part of those interested in drawing it up ; but there are many startling facts, which, if true, would make the refined cruelty of the silent system appear less humane and merciful than was the Spanish Inquisition.

I am yours, most obediently,

WM. SIMPSON.

110, Guildford-street, May 12, 1840.

ON THE DEPLETING AND STIMULATING METHODS OF TREATING TYPHUS FEVER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—It appears to me, that during the last ten or fifteen years the minds of general practitioners, and young men coming forward in the medical profession, have been very much confused by the variety of opinions held by eminent physicians, as to the treatment and pathology of various diseases, particularly those called malignant. It is well known that one class of practitioners say, fever is essentially inflammatory, and take blood on all occasions where the excitement is great. Another class hold the very opposite opinion, and say, fevers are at all times liable to assume a typhoid type, and if you want to serve your patient you must not bleed, as by doing so you will reduce his strength, and take from the system a quantity of vital fluid, which would ultimately be necessary to keep him from sinking.

Having seen a great number of cases of the worst kind of typhus fever in Belfast, Dublin, Edinburgh, and London, and having seen all kinds of treatment tried with nearly the same average success, I was at a loss to account for such contradictory results. I had always heard the subject reasoned on in a mathematical manner, and, of course, expected precise consequences to given premises, viz., if (as one party say) you have ten cases of typhus fever, and don't bleed, you are sure to lose the half of them ; but if you do bleed, you will, to a certainty, save nine of them. The advocates of the other system make the same calculations with the same confidence as to the results. To my surprise I found the one party nearly as successful as the other, and the most fortunate hospital physicians were those who adopted a mixed kind of treatment, or (as Dr. Graham, of Edinburgh, advised us to do, when we were puzzled in our diag-

nosis,) “treated the symptoms as they occurred, attacking the most prominent first.”

As an illustration of the glorious uncertainty of prejudiced views, either for or against bleeding, I shall mention a case which occurred in the Edinburgh Infirmary, in 1828 or 1829. Dr. Duncan (author of the “Edinburgh Dispensary,” and then editor of the “Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal,”) was, at the time, attending and giving clinical lectures. The patient was admitted evidently labouring under the worst symptoms of typhus fever; the debility was extreme, accompanied with low muttering delirium, difficulty in deglutition, sordes upon the tongue and teeth, and a few small petechial spots upon the skin. He was ordered wine, with aperients, and the usual remedies; in the course of a day or two the brain changed from that state, which the Doctor called congested, to what he considered to be active inflammation. What was to be done? If we don’t bleed this man he will die of inflammation of the brain; and if we don’t give him wine he will sink from the effects of typhus fever. To our surprise, the Doctor determined to try both. The man was bled from the arm, and the quantity of wine increased. The next day his head appeared better, and the fever about the same. Leeches were applied to his temples and behind his ears. The wine was ordered to be continued, and, if necessary, increased. The following day the head was better, and the fever less; the sordes began to disappear, and with them the fever. The man became convalescent, and was able to leave the hospital *sooner* than others who had not been so severely affected, and had been merely treated with salines and aperients. It strikes me, that in the above case the disordered state of the blood was the cause of the deranged functions of the brain, and that the bleeding, in place of inducing dangerous debility, made room for an equal quantity of wine and water, or some other fluid. It is much to be wished that some lecturer would take the trouble to concentrate the observations and experiments of M. Magendie, Dr. M. Hall, and others, upon the subject of the state of the blood in various diseases, the effects of blood-letting, of medicines (wine included), and of the absorption of deranged secretions from the liver, kidneys, &c. &c. upon the blood. There can be no doubt but that the system of bleeding, largely accompanied by evacuating and antiphlogistic remedies, has been carried too far; so, also, has the stimulating plan; and very often natural strength of constitution

has contributed more towards cure than the treatment adopted by either party. The advocates for reserving the vital fluid, forget there must be a great difference in the quality of blood in a state of health and a state of disease—that what is vital in the one might be vicious, nay, even poisonous, in the other, as has been observed, by Dr. Hall and others, in cases of jaundice and suppression of urine. If this be correct, the blood in place of supporting the strength may be doing harm, by causing functional derangements in the brain, lungs, liver, &c., and thereby keeping up the very state which you want to alter. I consider the deficiency caused by the loss of a pint of blood would not be badly made up for, in such cases, by giving as much barley-water, or toast in water, as the patient chose to take, and, if necessary, occasionally a cupful of mutton-broth or beef-tea. I am also fully persuaded, that what Dr. Hall calls trial-bleeding might often be very usefully adopted. In the above remarks I did not consider it necessary to say anything about the general treatment, diet, &c., as all are aware of the necessity of removing morbid secretions as soon as they are formed. My object is merely to draw attention to the subject, and not to claim any originality of thought or observation, as I know many practitioners who entertain the same views.

I hope the importance of the subject will be a sufficient excuse for the length of this letter.

I remain, Sir, your most obedient servant,

WILLIAM SIMPSON.

110, Guildford Street, April 8, 1840.

EXTRACTED FROM THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

BUT, previously to giving some account of Sir C. Bell's pamphlet, we would offer a word or two on the "history of articles on medical reform." It has hitherto been supposed that the article in the "Quarterly Review," attributed to the pen of Sir B. Brodie, was the first which awakened the attention of non-professional persons to this important subject.

In the "British and Foreign Review" for July 1840, will be found a very excellent article by Mr. William Simpson, (we believe,) entitled, "Medical Reform," in which the different bearings of the question are carefully examined, *and which is as superior in correctness of views to the production of Sir B. Brodie, as it is anterior in date.*

